

# **Situation report on presence of Internally Displaced people in Nepalgunj Municipality (September '02)**

## **Objective**

This paper briefly outlines the current situation regarding IDP's within Nepalgunj municipality. This information was gathered within the last 3 days (16<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> September) and was gathered through visiting different areas of Nepalgunj and talking with locals and those already displaced. It was undertaken by IMP and NCHDP facilitators. Other Nepalgunj based staff have also been encouraged to monitor the situation and report on it. The objective is to ensure that decisions made with regard to displaced peoples are based on the actual situation on the ground.

## **Current situation**

### *Youth*

Over the last few months there has been a noticeable increase in the numbers of young people, particularly men, within Nepalgunj. Most of these young men are from surrounding Districts, principally Banke and Bardia. The primary reason for them coming to Nepalgunj is fear of forced recruitment. Most of these men are living in rented accommodation, in groups and earn a living by driving rick-shaws. A large amount of building is also currently going on in Nepalgunj providing other employment opportunities. Although life is not particularly easy for these people they are not in need of assistance at this stage.

### *'Middle class'*

In the past few months a number of better-off families have moved into the area, purchased land and are building houses. These people are from a wide area and include families from Karnali. They are generally well off and not in need of assistance. Some less well off people are staying with family members in this area. In some cases students studying in Nepalgunj have not been able to return to their home areas.

### *"Hill people"*

Normal migration patterns of people from the middle - hill districts and Karnali have been affected. Greater numbers are migrating, though still very few women. Migrants generally only take their families when they have a fixed job in India. The number of migrants returning to their home areas is also reduced, however there is still movement of male migrants through Nepalgunj traveling back to the hills from India e.g. for rice planting and harvest. These 'pahadis' do not stay in Nepalgunj any longer than they have to. Work opportunities are much greater in India and better fit their skills and experience. Generally they are not able to ride rick-shaws so this is not an option for them. Occasionally, individuals remain in Nepalgunj if they have found work options and have no friends to travel to India with, as it is expensive to go by oneself. These hill people are very unlikely to stay in Nepalgunj unless there is no way of getting to India. This would only happen if the border was closed. This is feasible (the Indian Government closed the Punjab border in the past) but would require a large scale military operation. It is doubtful whether this would be thought of as worthwhile by the Indian Government unless there is a very significant increase in the numbers of Nepali's moving to India.

### *'Local displacement'<sup>1</sup>*

There are some families and individuals who have moved from their home areas to centres for 'protection' having had family members killed or beaten by forces from either or both sides. Informal stories from other centres (Surkhet & Ghorahi) indicate this is happening though the level of protection afforded at these centres is not high. These reports indicate that people move to areas where they have contacts (friends / family / churches), which are generally the 'urban' areas close to their home areas. The type of work available in the area is also a

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<sup>1</sup> Information particularly from Shaha Gurung, gathered during visits to Ghorahi and Surkhet

factor, with people more likely to have skills suited to jobs in their 'local area'. Contacts may also increase the chance of finding work. With an escalation of conflict in rural areas the numbers moving are likely to increase. It is not clear what 'status' / wealth bracket these groups include. It should be noted that these people are not very 'visible' and do not seem to be widely known about even in the areas they have moved to - probably for reasons of their own security.

## **Conclusions**

Although people are being displaced and normal migration patterns are being affected by the security situation, there are not at present large numbers of poor displaced people gathering in Nepalgunj. Those who have been displaced still appear to be being 'absorbed' by local contacts, or are following normal 'survival strategies' of migration to India. India is likely to be the main destination for most migrants, particularly those from the hills. Build up on the Terai is only likely to occur if the border is sealed.

## **Recommendations**

Monitoring the IDP situation is a labour intensive occupation, but is essential if we are to obtain an accurate view of what is actually happening. This is being done at District level in the Mid West by District managers but more resources for this would be beneficial. A full time local person who is able to travel widely and report clearly might be beneficial. RTU staff are also being utilized although there is currently no specific funds for travel outside the Nepalgunj area.

In the current situation, working with local churches to support individual displaced families and groups might be an effective way of assisting those particularly in need, without increasing the flow of people to urban areas by raising expectations. This approach also fits well with CDTP and planned CHDP type activities. In addition to 'economic' rehabilitation services, trauma counseling may also be a need in specific cases. At this stage, this would seem a more appropriate approach than a full scale 'absorption' programme. A larger scale programme would be appropriate if there is evidence that movement from rural areas is significantly increasing and the border with India is likely to be closed because of this.